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HEADLINE: OSU JUSTIFIED IN ACCEPTING STUDY FUNDS

BODY:

I respond to misunderstandings raised by letters to the editor printed recently regarding the acceptance by Ohio State University of funds from Philip Morris for research with zebra fish.

Most advances in human medicine have come about from studies of other animals. Even seemingly primitive organisms, such as yeast and fruit flies, have contributed to the understanding and treatment of human disorders, ranging from cancer to Alzheimer's disease. Zebra fish are another animal adding to the knowledge of human disease, being especially useful as a vertebrate that develops rapidly and contains the same genes and organs present in humans.

Knowledge gained from zebra fish studies already have helped scientists understand human developmental disorders, heart disease and spinal muscular atrophy, to mention only a few. The specific study in question will address the role of receptors for nicotine, similar to those in human brains, in normal neural development and how nicotine exposure may produce nervous- system deficits, in addition to the disorders mentioned by letter writer Linda P. Orenchuk. Knowledge of nicotine receptors is also being used to develop drugs that may aid smoking cessation.

OSU could not accept the smoking-cessation grant from the Ohio Tobacco Use Prevention and Control Foundation because of severe restrictions placed on the university by the foundation, even though OSU strongly supports those programs. Without the restrictions, both grants would have been accepted by OSU. Blame for the loss of the smoking-cessation programs in Ross and Vinton counties should be placed where it belongs: on the shortsighted policies of the foundation, not OSU or the helpful zebra fish.

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